There are an estimated 600,000 hysterectomies performed annually in the United States, making this the second most common surgical procedure for women after cesarean section. There are many indications for hysterectomy including fibroids, menstrual bleeding disorders, endometriosis, uterine prolapse, cancer and precancerous conditions to name a few.

Fibroids are the cause for 40% of all hysterectomies. These are benign growths in the wall of the uterus, and the resulting symptoms are determined by the location, number and size of the fibroids. It is most important when considering treatment options to take the time to do a thorough evaluation, and realistically consider your desire for fertility, symptoms and impact on quality of life as a result of the fibroids. Once these factors have been determined one can evaluate suitable options, prolapse including the risks, benefits and appropriate alternatives.

The second most common indication for hysterectomy is menstrual bleeding disorders. Before proceeding with surgery consider a trial of medical management. A thorough evaluation in the office consisting of hormone evaluation, transvaginal ultrasound, saline infusion sonogram, and endometrial biopsy will often, but not always, give an indication of the cause of the abnormal bleeding. If a polyp or fibroid is identified along the uterine lining, these can be removed by accessing the uterus through the cervix. These hysteroscopic procedures are typically very safe, effective and require a maximum of 48 hours for recovery. If no structural abnormality is found, endometrial ablation which permanently thins the uterine lining is also very effective and safe when child-bearing is complete.

Lastly, if a hysterectomy is indicated there are several new, very exciting, surgical approaches. At Cleveland Clinic Florida’s Section of Minimally Invasive Gynecology we perform 85% of hysterectomies entirely laparoscopically, or with a bellybutton approach. This approach significantly reduces blood loss and recovery time. Patients can go home the same day and are fully recovered by 10 days. Despite the widely publicized “horror stories”, large studies show the vast majority of women undergoing a hysterectomy are very satisfied with the results and experience improved quality of life.

Your best approach is to learn as much as possible about your particular condition prior to making a decision to proceed with either medical management or surgery. Your doctor should be helpful in teaching you about your condition, and all of the available treatment options. Make sure you select a physician who is comfortable performing the surgical procedure YOU are comfortable with, not just the procedure he/she is comfortable performing. Not all gynecologists perform each of these procedures.